



STATE OF RHODE ISLAND

DIVISION OF PUBLIC UTILITIES & CARRIERS

Administration

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April 1, 2021

The Honorable Marvin L. Abney
Chairman – House Committee on Finance
State House
Providence, R.I. 02903

Re: Budget Article 8

Dear Chairman Abney:

The Division of Public Utilities and Carriers (Division) strongly supports the provisions in Article 8 which requires electric and gas distribution companies to file effective utility restoration plans with the Division and provides a means to enforce acceptable standards of utility restoration. This legislation provides the Division the means to work proactively to mitigate service disruptions and provide statutory and regulatory guidance for electric and gas distribution companies that will serve Rhode Islanders into the future.

In reviewing major utility service disruptions, the Division has, on occasion, opened dockets to review the utility response, adequacy of planning, resources acquisition and related issues. Notably, the Division opened formal proceedings after Tropical Storm Irene in 2011 and after a major storm outage in October 2017. In each instance a thorough review of emergency response procedures occurred, and procedural changes were addressed. While beneficial, this process was reactive. The requirements in Article 8 are proactive, in that, emergency response plans are filed and reviewed annually, not just in response to a major outage. These provisions mirror language that has been in place in Massachusetts.

The timing of Article 8 is also auspicious, given that National Grid is in the process of seeking regulatory approval to transfer ownership of its Rhode Island distribution utilities to another corporate entity. This measure would give the incumbent distribution company, and any other entity in the future, clear statutory direction on the standards for emergency response plans and the responsibility to execute them properly.

Finally, the legislation clearly provides for any revenues from fines levied against investor-owned utilities be credited back to customers, in a manner approved by the Public Utilities Commission.

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The Division remains committed to ensuring safe and reliable utility service. Budget Article 8 provides us with important tools to more effectively achieve these goals.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Linda George".

Linda George, Esq.
Administrator, RI Division of Public Utilities and Carriers

Cc: House Committee on Finance